

VZCZCXRO8403

OO RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW
RUEHLA RUEHLH RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHNEH RUEHNP RUEHPOD RUEHPW RUEHROV
RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHTA #2398/01 3391115
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 041115Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY ASTANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4028
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE 0889
RUCNCLS/SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0294
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0996
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFAAA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC 0456
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC 0371
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ASTANA 002398

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [OSCE](#) [KDEM](#) [KZ](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: OPPOSITION PARTIES CRITICIZE MADRID LAWS, BUT
FAIL TO OFFER A WAY FORWARD

REF: ASTANA 2249

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) This is the first in a series of cables analyzing
reactions to Kazakhstan's Madrid legislation.

13. (SBU) SUMMARY: On November 19, a group of Western diplomats met
with leading opposition parties to gather their reactions to the
draft laws on political parties, elections, and the media, which are
currently being considered by the Mazhelis (parliament's lower
house). The oppositionists maintained that the new laws will do
little to liberalize Kazakhstan's political climate. Azat's Chair,
Bulat Abilov, levied criticism against Western governments and the
OSCE for "supporting Nazarbayev's regime," although his colleagues
did not seem to support his views. The sole NGO representative
chastised the opposition parties for blaming the West for issues the
Kazakhstanis "should be solving themselves." In a poignant example
of the occasional tension between civil society and the opposition,
the Kazakhstani participants engaged in a heated exchange accusing
each other of not doing enough to promote liberalization. END
SUMMARY.

14. (SBU) On November 18-19, a group of Astana-based Western
diplomats traveled to Almaty to meet with representatives of
opposition parties and civil society to gather their views on the
draft laws on elections, political parties, and the media, which are
currently being considered by the parliament. The group, informally
known as the "HR group," includes officers who cover human rights
issues for the embassies of the United States, United Kingdom,
Canada, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands and Austria, and meet
regularly to exchange information on various human rights issues.
On November 19, the group met with with Azat Chair Bulat Abilov,
Deputy Chair Peter Svoik, National Social Democratic Party (NSDP)
Deputy Amirzhan Kosanov, and Alga President Vladimir Kozlov. The
group also met with an independent economist and former Azat party
co-chair, Oraz Zhandosov, as well as the president of the
election-monitoring NGO Republican Network of Independent Monitors
(RNIM), Taskyn Rakhimbekova.

OPPOSITION EXPECTS LITTLE FROM THE NEW LAWS...

15. (SBU) Alga's Kozlov said that since the draft laws had yet to be
publicized, civil society organizations had been obliged to rely
solely on government's press releases for information. Kozlov

nonetheless maintained that the law on political parties will regulate, rather than afford, the right to free association. He asserted that, under the new provisions, the future of his own as-yet-unregistered party is far from certain. Under the current legislation, he explained, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) can suspend a party's registration process indefinitely, but the party's establishing committee can still function freely in recruiting new members and publicizing their platform, stopping just short of elections. The new law would still allow the MOJ to suspend the registration, but also impose a six-month life-span on the establishing committee. "This means that our committee will be disbanded every six months," he asserted.

16. (SBU) Speaking more broadly, Kozlov alleged that the country's political environment is pushing opposition parties toward left-leaning political platforms. According to Kozlov, Alga had been created as a center-right party, but "pressure and harassment" from the authorities "pushed us left." While initially "the party of the businessman," Alga changed its strategy and began building a base in the countryside, "where people have no concept of human rights." The National Social Democratic Party (NSDP) Deputy, Amirzhan Kosanov, agreed, noting that while opposition parties may differ in platforms, all are "united in the belief that Kazakhstan needs to build a democracy in the European fashion."

... AND SOME BLAME THE WEST FOR THE SHORTCOMINGS

17. (SBU) Azat's chair Bulat Abilov took over the conversation and moved it from the Madrid commitments to what he perceived to be the shortcomings in the policies of Western nations toward Kazakhstan. Briefly explaining that Azat garnered second-place in the 2004 elections, but has yet to gain any seats in Parliament, he radically shifted gears and announced that he is "angry with the OSCE, the EU,

ASTANA 00002398 002 OF 003

and the United States." According to Abilov, U.S. Vice President Cheney, German President Horst Koehler, and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi are all guilty of "strengthening Nazarbayev's regime" by expressing "undue admiration" for the Kazakhstani President and failing to "listen to the opposition" during their official visits. (NOTE: Abilov levied similar criticism in his meeting with the Ambassador (reftel). END NOTE.) The U.S. poloff gently reminded the Azat leader that while we may at times disagree on tactics, we still shared a common goal of promoting democratic development in Kazakhstan. The German representative told Abilov that the tight schedules of VIP visitors frequently make it impossible to schedule meetings in Almaty, where the majority of opposition parties and civil society organizations are based. Italy's representative clarified that PM Berlusconi's trip was purely a tourist trip and stressed that it was important to keep the bilateral dialogue open.

KAZAKHSTAN IS "OSCE'S ISSUE" NOW

18. (SBU) The Canadian representative reminded the oppositionists that "local ownership" is key in any country's democratic processes and asked whether the parties had specific strategies for dealing with Kazakhstan's seeming "voter apathy." Azat's Deputy, Peter Svoik, responded that the country's political system is based on "pure falsification" and the new laws would only strengthen it. "Without including opposition parties in the elections commissions, all talk of democratic participation is a moot point," he stressed. He alleged that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was facing a big problem because its incoming Chairman has "no respect for democratic principles." Kazakhstan's opposition parties have their own issues, he continued, but "in 2010, so will the OSCE." Svoik declared, "you'll either have to pretend that you know nothing of what goes on in Kazakhstan or admit to being hypocrites."

19. (SBU) Abilov alleged that Kazakhstan's political system has been flawed for many years, but that the OSCE "is only starting to pay attention now." Returning to what is obviously a favorite theme, Abilov lamented that during a 2005 meeting with several Western Ambassadors, "only the U.S., UK, and Dutch Ambassadors paid any attention." In a long diatribe in Russian, Abilov said the Italian

Ambassador was "bored at the meeting and paid more attention to the buttons on his shirt." (It was obvious that Abilov's colleagues were uncomfortable with his fervent criticism. Zhandosov, a fluent English-speaker, who had taken over the interpretation to give the interpreter a break, opted not to relay the majority of Abilov's statement, saying simply that it "wasn't translatable." Kosanov quietly murmured to Abilov under his breath "enough already.") Kazakhstan has many human rights issues, but so do many Western nations, maintained Abilov, and by allowing Kazakhstan to become chair, the OSCE "is losing its credibility."

"WHY BLAME THE FOREIGNERS?"

¶10. (SBU) RNIM's Rakhimbekova, the civil society representative, broke in to chastise the oppositionists for blaming the West "for our problems." "Why do we have to rely on foreigners to do what we should do ourselves?" she asked. Abilov again tried to raise the plight of the opposition, but Rakhimbekova sharply cut him off by saying that he spoke "long enough." Rakhimbekova said the main problem with the new laws is that input from opposition and civil society has been largely excluded from the drafts. "We've yet to see the new laws," she stressed, "despite the fact that we've been asking the government for them for a month."

¶11. (SBU) Rakhimbekova's attempt to steer the conversation back to the Madrid commitments did not take hold, however. Abilov, bristling at the accusation that the opposition wasn't doing enough, accused civil society of "always running to the OSCE." At this point the participants seemingly forgot about the presence of foreign diplomats, and the conversation dissolved into a round of heated mutual accusations that civil society was spending too much time abroad and the opposition was not doing enough at home. Attempts to bring it back on track by the moderator did not succeed before the meeting's end.

"POLITICAL THEATER" FOR A FOREIGN AUDIENCE

ASTANA 00002398 003 OF 003

¶12. (SBU) In a separate conversation, Rakhimbekova referred to the meeting as "the perfect example of our political theater." She dismissed Abilov's diatribes as "rants of a man who is afraid" that his party will not make it into the Mazhelis. (NOTE: The draft election law, which mandates that the party with the second-highest number of votes automatically gets into the Mazhelis, has generated speculation on which party will join Nur Otan in the parliament. END NOTE.) In a telling example of the divisions between opposition parties and NGOs, she asked not to be included in future meetings with the oppositionists, preferring, as she said, "to stick with my civil society colleagues." Separately, Alga's Kozlov quipped that a foreign audience "encourages some toward the pronouncement of fiery, but empty, slogans."

COMMENT

¶13. (SBU) Abilov is a leading figure in the opposition circles, but his criticism of the OSCE and the West should not be taken as the views of the opposition as a whole. Other leaders, including NSDP's Kosanov and Alga's Kozlov, told us in the past that Kazakhstan's 2010 OSCE chairmanship should prove to be a positive influence for the country's overall political liberalization. Rakhimbekova and Abilov's unabashed disagreement is indicative of the disconnect that sometimes exists between civil society and the opposition. None of the opposition parties, with the possible exception of the Communist Party, with its hefty historical legacy, have built a truly national party with a loyal grass-roots following. To a certain degree this is the result of the government's tight control of the political environment. In this respect, the proposed legislation, despite the many flaws pointed out by the oppositionists, still serves to loosen that control and move the country a step forward in its political liberalization. END COMMENT.

MILAS